

Sermon Outline.

STEPS OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

BY D. C. CHRISTNER. (A. D. 1875.)

Text—Rom. iv, 11, 12, 16.

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: That he might be the Father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also; and the Father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our Father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed: not to that only which is of the law, but to that also, which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the Father of us all."

These are the words of Paul to the Romans, in a letter written at *Corinth*, and carried to them at the hands of *Phoebe*. Up to this date the apostle had never been at *Rome*. He had only heard of their faith, which was "spoken of throughout the whole world." In company with certain brethren among whom were *Timotheus*, *Sosipater*, *Gaius* and *Erastus*, the Chamberlain of the city, he was on the eve of departing for *Jersusalem*, with contributions from the Saints, to feed and clothe the suffering Christians at *Jersusalem*. On his return, it was his intention to visit *Rome*, on his way to *Spain*.

Of the date and origin of the Church at *Rome*, but little is known. Whether because of their virtue, and many acts of piety, or on account of their church-quarrel, they had gained a notoriety, Paul declares of them, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Their influence had either gone out, as the sweet scent of the meadows and orchards of early spring, to gladden and rejoice the heart of the empire, or like a rising stench from a putrefying carcass, to nauseate, and disgust the people, with the very name of religion.

Paul had been at work in the wealthy and influential city of *Corinth*. Her wealth was so celebrated, as to be proverbial; and the influence from her temple to *Venus*, through the vice and profligacy of her inhabitants, was carried into society as the influence of a poisonous wind. Here Paul had planted a church; and the waves that beat upon the shore at the feet of the city, were but faint symbols, of the waves of trouble that were beating upon that

church. Some were for Paul, some for *Apollos*, some for *Cephas*, and but few for *Christ*. Strife and dissension, like a flood, had extinguished the fire of love on the altar of their faith, and they were in a broil. Here Paul had just concluded their troubles; and had sweetened the waters of the strife, by "the olive-branch of peace." The scepticism of a false and baseless philosophy had been confuted and repulsed; and the idol of a polished infidelity, he had broken under the hammer of truth. The heinousness of the sin of church strife, was unveiled; and received its appropriate rebuke. The leaven of incest and idolatrous lust, that was eating in the vitals of the church like a cancer, was consumed under the fire that fell from his tongue. The veil of hypocrisy had been drawn aside, and the wickedness of the pretender to the apostleship was fully exposed. The arrogant pride and self-aggrandizement on account of superior spiritual gifts, was superseded by charity. The resurrection of the body to an endless and glorious immortality, was shown to be the hope of the church; while the floods of passion and strife that were bringing destruction upon the church, were chained by the love of Christ and the power of God. Like a home, in the ashes and ruins of a bitter strife, Paul had found the spiritual household in *Corinth* in ruins. He had just concluded a reconciliation, and had reunited the family.

Like the reconstructed home of a reformed drunkard, the fire of love was burning brightly on their hearthstone, once more; the spiritual furniture was again arranged; pictures of love and affection, hung in groups upon the walls; from the chandelier of truth and righteousness, floods of light were filling the temple; and carrying joy and happiness to their hearts, as around their Father's table they were feasting upon the rich viands of heaven. Like a fruitful vine, under the sun of righteousness bringing summer to their souls, their hearts had bloomed and born fruit; and Paul was in the act of bearing some of the clusters up to the suffering saints at *Jersusalem*—as "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."

At this juncture, the difficulties at *Rome*, reached the ears of Paul; and as a beautiful summer day is disturbed by the sudden appearance of clouds and the muttering thunder of an approaching storm, the apostle's happiness was disturbed, and his heart troubled; and he sat down and wrote: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" "To all that be in *Rome*, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ"; "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." As the cool and refreshing stream that suddenly greets us on the mountain side, on its way to the parched meadows and withering flowers in the plain, these salutations and outpourings of the heart and soul, came to the Romans as a refreshing stream from the eternal springs of grace. "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established." This was the message they had waited for, long, and anxiously.

The Judaizing teachers at *Rome*, unwilling to forsake *Moses*, and *Elijah*, on the same mountain with a transfigured and glorified Christ. They had taught that circumcision and the keeping of the Jewish Law, were, in connection with the gospel, essential to justification and salvation. By a false interpretation of the scriptures, *Moses* was exalted to the authority of Christ; and the promise of Abraham confined to the flesh. The simplicity of the gospel was marred by the hand of a superstitious bigotry, and entombed within the sepulchre of *Moses*. Extremes beget extremes; and while some had chained the Christian faith to the car of Judaism, and its ponderous wheels were crushing the life of the church, others in the scepticism of an assumed and pretended loftiness of spiritual experience, were rejecting all the ordinances and means of grace, both Jewish and Christian. These like many since, had forgotten that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation, only to such as obey him.

They had forgotten that faith without an appropriate expression in the